

OBJECTIONS AGAINST ELECTION CONSIDERED.

BY J. NEWTON BROWN.

THE first and most important class of these objections relate to *the Character of God*. It is said, "It darkens the Divine Glory. It represents God as a respecter of persons, partial, capricious, cruel, and insincere."

It is with reluctance we even name such epithets in connection with the Divine Character; yet, since the doctrine of gratuitous personal election has been represented as implying such a reflection upon that spotless character, we must give the charge some consideration.

It might suffice to say that if it be once established as a revealed doctrine of scripture, such an objection falls at once. For it cannot be supposed, for a moment, that God would reveal a doctrine derogatory to the perfections He claims as belonging to His moral character. That this doctrine, however, is revealed in his word, has been already established by its proper evidence; and on the strength of this single fact we might dismiss the objection at once, did we not think it may be useful to examine it in detail, and thus see how utterly fallacious is the accusation in every one of its parts.

1. It is alleged that if Election be true, God is a "respector of persons," contrary to what is often asserted of Him in the Scriptures.

But this objection is founded entirely on a misapprehension of terms. To be a "respector of persons" is a phrase used in Scripture in reference to men and God, only in relation to the office of a judge. It signifies to be swayed from the administration of justice by a regard to outward distinctions, such as whether a man be of this nation, or

that; of this color or that; old or young; rich or poor; learned or unlearned; of lofty or low birth, connections and the like. This is manifestly wrong, and is therefore forbidden to earthly judges, both civil and ecclesiastical; and is denied as forming any part of the character of the righteous Judge of the world. But the doctrine of Election neither teaches nor implies that God regards any man for the sake of outward distinctions. No man is chosen on any such account, either to grace here, or to glory hereafter. Some of all descriptions are chosen, and many of all descriptions perish in their sins. If, in the distribution of his gifts, He favors any one class above another it is the most hopeless, helpless, despised and miserable. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise," &c. (1 Cor. 1: 26-31.)

Besides; the gifts of grace conferred by God are never conferred at the expense of justice; none are favored in such a way as implies injustice to others. Hence, there is no *partiality*. To bestow favors on whom a man pleases, or to any degree he pleases, is generosity; and all men admit that generosity is a glorious virtue, provided no injustice is done to others. But election is entirely a matter of generosity, and although it implies favors bestowed on some, beyond what are conferred on others, no one has a right to complain, for none are injured. But it is sometimes pertinaciously said, "Only a part are elected, and therefore it is still *partiality*." To this we reply; either you do not understand the meaning of the word *partiality*, or you do. If you do not, it is an objection of ignorance, to be removed by better knowledge. If you *do*, it is an objection of sophistry, in spite of better knowledge. Where all have equal *rights*, to favor one at the expense of another involves injustice, and is what we mean when we complain of any one as partial. But where every man's

rights are fully conceded, where justice and kindness characterize the treatment of all; then to favor some more highly than they deserve, and more highly than others, is a right which any generous man may exercise; without injustice, and without the imputation of partiality. This, in fact, is the very doctrine taught by our Lord in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. To one who murmured, the Lord of the vineyard mildly replies, (as God does to every one who murmurs against the election of grace); "Friend, I do thee no wrong. Have I not a right to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good," Matt. 20: 15. Even as he said to Moses, "I will cause all my *goodness* to pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee, and will be gracious *to whom I will* be gracious, and will show mercy *on whom I will* show mercy." Exod. 33: 18-19.

The principle of this objection involves the gross absurdity that God can make no distinctions in the universe; that every mite should have been a man, every man an angel, and every angel equal to Gabriel, or superior still, if there be any created being superior to him! *Impartial justice* is a glorious attribute; *impartial grace*, (of which we hear so much said in modern times,) is a profound absurdity—false in fact; unphilosophical in theory; a confusion in ideas; a contradiction in terms.

But it is said, "For God to choose one in preference to another, where there exists no ground of preference in the individual, is *capriciousness*." To this we answer, It is not asserted that in his choice, God acts without reason; but only that the reason for choice is not anything implying holiness or merit in the individual, nothing which can lay a foundation for pride in the elect, however strong and vast the foundation for gratitude. God never acts without reason; much less in a matter of such importance as this; but He assigns no other reason in this case, but His deter-

mination to glorify His mercy. "God who is rich in mercy, of His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ—that in the ages to come, He might show the exceeding riches of His grace, in his kindness towards us in Christ Jesus." Ephes. 2: 4–7. Why he chose to arrest Paul in his criminal career by a miracle, and leave Agrippa only almost persuaded to be a Christian, we cannot tell; but we see such overwhelming evidence of Divine Wisdom in all His works, as far as we are able to explore them, that we can cheerfully trust Him in matters beyond our reach, and we are always happy to say with our Saviour in reference to this very point; "Even so, Father! for so it seemed *good in thy sight*." Luke 10: 21. See also Rom. 11: 33–36. James 1: 16–18.

But it is again objected, "If God has already and immutably determined whom He will save, and whom He will not, how can He be *sincere* in what He says to the unconverted?" I answer, just as he would be, provided there were no such thing as an election of grace. He is still good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works. He has no pleasure at all in the death of the wicked, but rather that he turn and live. He has so loved the *world*, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him may not perish, but have eternal life. He commands the gospel to be preached to every creature. His Spirit is sent from Heaven to reprove the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. He deals with men as rational creatures, as free moral agents, justly accountable for the light, and love, and advantages bestowed upon them. All necessary means of salvation being actually provided for all at vast expense, there is not the slightest insincerity in inviting all to come and enjoy them freely. God is in earnest when he calls them; when he expostulates with them for their refusal; when He even descends to

the tender language of entreaty, and beseeches them for Christ's sake to be reconciled to God. It is, in fact, this very sincerity of His love to guilty and perishing sinners, which is one important means of arresting the conscience, and winning the hearts of all who are saved. For they are not chosen to be saved without means, but by means. Thus Paul says to the Thessalonian Christians, "God from the beginning hath chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth; whereunto also, he called you by our Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." 2 Thess. 2 : 13-14.

But, it is said, "Election cannot exist without Reprobation; the one is the necessary counterpart of the other; and to suppose that God brought creatures into existence, foreknowing and foredetermining that their existence to all eternity should be miserable, is nothing less than to create them to be damned—which is certainly the height of cruelty. How then can we possibly conceive such purposes to have been eternally cherished by a God of infinite love?"

This is, after all, the strong-hold of the objector. But blessed be God, the weapons of our spiritual warfare, through Him, "are mighty to the pulling down of strong-holds."

If the term Reprobation be properly understood it will be seen that it is not the counterpart of Election. To *reprobate*, is to *reject as worthless after proper trial*. It is the opposite of *approve*, and is so used in Scripture. 2 Cor. 13 : 7, "Now I pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear *approved*, but that ye should do what is honest, though we be as *reprobates*." It is *never* used in Scripture in such a connection as permits us to regard the term as the opposite of election. Nothing could be more absurd than to so understand it in 2 Cor. 13 : 5, where the apostle says, "Know ye not that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be *reprobates*." For, it by no means

follows that a man is not elected, much less that he is *finally rejected*, because Christ is not in him ; that is, because he is not at present a Christian. This is, in fact, precisely the condition of all the elect of God while in an unrenewed state. Many of the heathen of whom Paul speaks in Rom. 1 : 28, as "given over to a reprobate mind," were afterwards converted, and were thus ascertained to be of the number of "God's elect." Indeed the very circumstance of their being in this reprobate condition is urged by the Apostle as the reason why they were in need of the Gospel of Christ, and why it should be preached to them ; but if reprobation and election were opposites, the gospel could have done them no good. Bible election then and Bible reprobation are not opposites—the one term is not the antithesis of the other—the one idea is not the counterpart of the other.

"But if some are gratuitously chosen to salvation, what becomes of the rest ? Are they not passed over and rejected ? And what is this but reprobation ?"

I answer, the condition of those not chosen is, in the first place, no worse than if there had been none chosen. As far as the mere act of choice is concerned, they are not affected one way nor another. They are regarded just as favorably as they could have been without it. Indeed, in the second place, the execution of the purpose of election gives them advantages which they could not have enjoyed without it. All the means and influences favorable to their present happiness and eternal salvation, from the piety of Christians and the preaching of faithful ministers, flows from this source. Had not Paul been "a chosen vessel," what a vast difference would it have made in the means of salvation among mankind ! If you are lost, it will not be because you are not elected, nor because others were ; but because you preferred your sins to the Saviour, and then your eye was evil because God was good.

That the scriptures teach some sort of reprobation is not denied. But it is not an *absolute* reprobation. It is altogether *conditional*. It is the same as *condemnation for sin*, and stands in opposition, not to election, but to approval and justification. Hence the language of the prophet; "Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them." Jer. 6 : 30. But such a reprobation all must admit, whether election be true or not. All but Universalists believe that *some* will be condemned and rejected at the last day; that they will *deserve* this; that God has determined it; that he foreknows it; that foreseeing this result from the foundation of the world, he yet chose to bring them into being, and that his doing so involves nothing inconsistent with his goodness, inasmuch as he made them and treats them as free moral agents. "Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? God forbid, (says the Apostle); for how then shall God judge the world." Rom. 3 : 5-6. If, then, it be just in God to condemn and cast off the wicked at the last day, it cannot be wrong to *determine* to do so from eternity; unless it be *wrong* for God always to determine to do what is *right*. And if this is creating men to be damned, it is an objection which presses upon the doctrine of free agency and future retribution, and not upon the doctrine of election; that is, it presses upon the creed of the Arminian, and not upon the distinguishing creed of the Calvinist. The creed of the latter involves no other reprobation than that of the former. Election secures the conversion and salvation of millions, probably in the sum total of the vast majority of the human race; it prevents the salvation of *no one*; it augments, instead of diminishing, the means of grace to all; it is therefore a doctrine which to its full extent exalts the divine goodness; it is a clear gain to the universe, without possible loss; it is therefore a doctrine full of glory. Instead of derogating from the divine character, it sheds new

brightness upon it, and new brightness over the system of which it constitutes an essential and distinguishing part.

But there yet remains another class of objections grounded upon *the supposed practical tendency* of this glorious scriptural doctrine, to which we must advert—to demonstrate its harmony with the entire system of evangelical truth, as a “doctrine according to godliness.” As these are rather *difficulties* felt by some of its friends who but imperfectly understand and believe it, we shall generally state them in the form of inquiries, as they are commonly proposed.

1. “Does not the doctrine of (gratuitous, personal) Election limit the preaching of the Gospel freely and fully to men as sinners?”

Not at all. How should it? It proceeds upon the principle that all men are sinners, and that the precious provisions of the Gospel are made for them as such, without distinction or exception. It proceeds upon the principle that they can be saved only through the acceptance of these provisions, and of course, through the knowledge and belief of them. It proceeds upon the principle that all men are free moral agents, and that they can only be saved as such; and that the Gospel must be preached fully and freely to *all* mankind: in order that those who are chosen to salvation may be convinced of sin and led to the Lamb of God, and that those who reject it may know and feel that God is not chargeable with their blood.

2. And as this doctrine does not limit the preaching of the Gospel, so neither does it lessen the obligations of all who hear it, as reasonable and accountable beings to embrace it. The Gospel is *true*. It challenges examination as a history of facts, on the proper evidence of facts. It is the truth of God. It is confirmed by the authority of miracles and prophecy. As such, men are bound to receive and obey it. It is truth breathing good-will to men; bringing in its bosom

an immeasurable store of the richest blessings for our guilty race ; and all, therefore, are bound, by a proper regard to their own and others' happiness, to embrace it with gratitude and joy. The doctrine that God has chosen to influence effectually some to embrace it, who otherwise would not, surely cannot interfere with the obligation of all to do it, "It is a faithful saying, and therefore worthy of all acceptance." 1 Tim. 1 : 15.

3. But it is anxiously asked, "Will men so understand it? Will not the impenitent sinner shelter himself under this doctrine as a shield against conviction? Will he not say, it is of *no use for me to do anything*, for if I am elected to salvation, I cannot be lost; and if not, do what I may, I cannot be saved?"

To this I answer, This course may possibly be pursued by some; but then it is manifestly an *abuse* of the doctrine; and any branch of the doctrine of grace is liable also to be abused in the same manner. So there were those in the time of the Apostles who perverted the grand doctrine of justification by faith, saying, "Let us continue in sin, that grace may abound." Still the Apostles ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus Christ. In spite of such abuses they still proclaimed the true Apostolic Creed, "We believe that by the GRACE of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved." Acts 15; 11. Now gratuitous Election is one branch of this doctrine of grace, and if "ungodly men" now, as well as then, will "turn the grace of God into wantonness," we have only to point out the perversion clearly, as the Apostles did, and warn such perverters of their guilt and doom.

We say this is a *perversion* and *abuse* of the doctrine. For it proceeds upon the false supposition that men are elected to salvation *without means*; whereas the doctrine teaches that the *means* are as much comprehended in the Divine Purpose as the *end*.

4. But it is again inquired: "Is not this doctrine discouraging to the timid inquirer after salvation? May he not be tempted to think he is not one of the elect, and therefore there is no mercy for him?"

Yes, he may be *tempted* to this false conclusion, as well as to others. But this is no solid objection. The doctrine, *properly applied*, is full of encouragement. It assures us that the grace of God will be effectual wherever He pleases; and therefore I need not despair because of the power of my corruptions. God is still giving me the word and day of grace; why may I not then hope He will make them effectual to me as well as others, while I call upon him for mercy? The anxiety I now feel is perhaps the product of His Spirit, enlightening and awakening my soul. By a like process I see others become truly converted; why may it not be so with me? I hear the Saviour saying: "All that the Father giveth me, shall come to me; and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." John 6: 37. Blessed words of encouragement for a perishing sinner! If then, guilty and wretched and polluted as I am, I come to *Him*, He will not cast *me* out. With this hard heart and confused mind, conscious only of wrong and wretchedness beyond conception, I see no other way of relief. From the urgency of my need I come to Him, and O! he assures me He will *in no wise* cast me out. Nay, more. Thus coming to Him for salvation, He tells me, I am "drawn by the Father," in a way I should not otherwise have chosen—that this influence that brings me to Him is the gift of God—that I myself indeed am one "given him by the Father" to redeem and save. O mystery of grace! Why did not I understand it before?

"Here, Lord, I give myself away,
'Tis all that I can do."

"O what did I now see in that blessed sixth of John!" exclaims Bunyan, in speaking of his own conversion.

5. "But is not this doctrine *so preached* as to lead to Antinomianism?" What if it is? *Such* preaching is an abuse of it. This can only happen when it is mis-stated, misunderstood, pushed to improper extremes; or pressed out of proportion—out of season—in a bad spirit—without due regard to its practical nature. But this is no reason for refusing to preach it at all. The same faults are found in connection with all doctrines whatsoever, when treated by ill-informed or unskillful hands. The precepts of God, and not his purposes, are the rule of human duty.

The doctrine of Election is too glorious, too true to the divine attributes, too clearly revealed in the Scriptures, and too well confirmed by the actual experience of true believers, to fear anything from the open attacks of its enemies. But when its professed advocates so misapply it, as to ground upon it a systematic opposition to the freedom of moral agency, the force of moral obligation, the unlimited preaching of the Gospel to sinners; the fullness of the provisions, the freeness of the invitations, and the fearful responsibility of all who reject it; in a word, when they present it in connexions, and pervert it to purposes utterly foreign to its nature as exhibited in the word of God, then it is that occasion is given to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme; the tender-hearted believer is grieved and retires; and the way of truth is evil spoken of, among those from whom we might have hoped better things.

To avoid these painful consequences, let every minister "study to approve himself unto God, rightly dividing the word of truth." The excellent Andrew Fuller may be named as a good example of this fidelity and wisdom.

6. But it may be said by some; "If the doctrine of Election is open to so many plausible objections, and liable to such pernicious abuses, *of what use is it to preach it?* Why, at least, may not I be silent upon it, lest the truth of God suffer through my unskillfulness?"

"Why may not I be silent about it!" Because it is the truth of God. Because it is a truth *revealed*, and "things revealed belong to us." Because "all scripture," and this among the rest, "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Because it is the brightest manifestation of the divine glory—the highest effort of Infinite Love—the richest cordial of the suffering believer on earth—his sweetest song amidst the beatitudes of heaven. Because it abounds in motives to holiness and humility, to thanksgiving and prayer; to trust in God for the future, and active imitation of his free mercy towards the most miserable, guilty and unworthy of men. "Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things?"

But you fear the truth of God "may suffer through your unskillfulness." Becoming fear! But if this be *all* you fear, why is your humble diffidence confined to *this* point alone? Why not tremble at any other point to touch the ark of God? My brother, let me solemnly beseech you to examine, whether your fear be not that "fear of man, which bringeth a snare." Is it not the dread of losing your popularity with certain individuals? or, at least, the dread of the necessary study and self-denial, diligence and prayer? Ah, why did you accept a commission which you are incompetent faithfully to fulfill? But you have accepted it. Your ordination vows are still fresh in recollection. Remember *they* bound you to "preach the word." But *this* is an essential part of "the word." And the hour is at hand, when your only satisfaction will be found in the review of a faithful ministry—in saying with the Apostle, "I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men; for I have not shunned to declare unto you, *all the counsel of God*."